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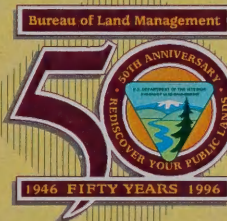


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Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management



# *Accomplishments and Priorities 1996*



Mike Dombeck, Acting Director  
October 1996



# *Working with the People to Improve the Health of the Land*

## **Summary of BLM Accomplishments - 1996**

### ❖ **Cooperation with Local Governments**

In May 1996, the BLM signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding with the National Association of Counties, co-signed by the U.S. Forest Service, to foster closer cooperation in managing the public lands. The BLM has continued to pursue formal working agreements with individual counties and currently has over 240 such agreements in place.

### ❖ **Cultural Heritage**

The BLM has been working with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers on an agreement to simplify agency compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. This agreement will expand BLM's Historic Preservation activities by devoting needed personnel and resources to the program. The agreement will also emphasize early planning, public education, and outreach efforts between the agency and State Historic Preservation Offices.

In addition, the BLM has contacted more than 150 Tribes and developed part-

nerships with over 70 museums and numerous federal agencies to fulfill its responsibilities under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

### ❖ **Customer Service**

In response to increasing public demands for better service, the Director of the BLM and the Chief of the Forest Service, with active support from the Vice President's NPR office, have designated the National Forest and BLM Districts in southern Colorado and central Oregon to lead in designing and implementing innovative customer service measures. The districts are evaluating common processes to be reengineered, for a projected cost savings of between 30 and 50 percent in the customer services that are targeted.

In cooperation with the Western Utility Group and the Forest Service, the BLM is streamlining the receipt and processing of rights-of-way applications on public lands, including processing applications by telephone and facsimile and authorizing credit card transactions. The effort establishes a standard of 30 days for routine application processing.

The BLM is also streamlining its planning process, in response to recommendations of the Western Governors' Association and to internal evaluations, to:

- ❖ shift emphasis from plan development to plan implementation, assessment, monitoring, and evaluation;
- ❖ link management objectives to performance indicators;
- ❖ provide improved means to involve the public in resource management and keep them informed;
- ❖ reduce the costs and time required for developing plans.

### ❖ **Desert Protection Act**

During the past year, the BLM initiated an extensive outreach program targeted to the general public and to constituent groups—including conservationists and recreationists, grazing permittees, right-of-way holders, and others—to broaden understanding of the terms of the act and facilitate implementation of its provisions. The Bureau also developed policies regarding fire, access for the disabled, grazing,





special uses, water rights, and law enforcement.



### Film Permits

With a new rule published in June, the BLM has streamlined the process of issuing leases and permits for general land use, including those relating to commercial filmmaking. The simplified process is saving time and money, benefitting the commercial users of public lands as well as taxpayers. The new rule gives BLM managers on the ground the flexibility to issue permits for those activities that cause only minimal environmental impacts on public land resources. The activities must be consistent with any local zoning ordinances and all other legal requirements, including the National Environmental Policy Act and other resource, environmental, and health protection laws. The activities must also not cause appreciable damage or disturbance to resources on the public lands.



### Forest Health

In the most comprehensive interagency ecological study ever undertaken, the BLM and Forest Service are moving toward a significant milestone in the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Study, which will identify strategies for

promoting healthy forests while serving other ecological, social, and economic objectives. A draft EIS is due to be completed in November. During 1996, the BLM has also:

- ❖ accelerated salvage of dead and dying timber (88 million board feet offered) in accordance with Rescissions Bill salvage rider through a cooperative effort with regulatory agencies;
- ❖ initiated a 3-year American Forests Assistance Agreement to support public education on Forest Ecosystem Health; and
- ❖ implemented the Mt. Trumbull Ecological Restoration Project to restore stands of ponderosa pine in Arizona, a milestone in forest restoration research.



### Healthy Rangelands

In consultation with Governors, the BLM has created 24 Resource Advisory Councils throughout the West representing conservation and commodity interests, local government, and the public at large to promote collaborative, community-based decisionmaking in land management issues.

The citizen councils are presently developing standards and guidelines for the BLM's Healthy Rangelands Initiative, with the goal of restoring 20 million acres of upland rangelands and 100,000 acres of riparian habitat.



### Heavy Oil Property Royalty Rate Reduction

In late 1995 and early 1996, the heavy crude industry was suffering from low prices and high production costs. As many as two-thirds of marginal properties could be shut-in or abandoned during a period of sustained low oil prices. To avoid this situation, the BLM published a rule on February 8, 1996, that reduces royalty rates for Federal producers of heavy crude oil. As a direct result of this action, more wells will remain in production even when oil prices are low. Fewer recoverable reserves will be lost and adverse impacts on States and local communities will be minimized.



### Minerals

During 1996, the BLM published a final rule that gives the Bureau the administrative tools to stop squatters from illegally occupying BLM-managed lands on mining



claims they are using for non-mining purposes. A claimant's use and occupancy must relate to prospecting or exploration, mining or processing operations, or other land uses that are reasonably related to such activities. The BLM also promulgated the Bonding and Use Authorization Regulation, as well as implementing the Mineral Patent Processing Plan.



### **Moving Resources to the Ground**

For fiscal year 1996, Acting Director Dombeck has expanded the "Director's Field Initiatives" program, which redirects funding from the BLM Washington Headquarters to key projects undertaken at the resource area level. The program provides additional incentive for projects that demonstrate creative partnership efforts and that relate in a direct and measurable way to the health of the land. In 1996, funding for the Director's Field Incentives increased from \$50,000 to \$400,000. More than 30 individual projects were selected for supplemental funding this year.

The BLM has also expanded the Health of the Land Awards program, another initiative created by the Acting Director to acknowledge outstanding efforts by partner-

ships in helping to promote the Bureau's mission of maintaining the health of the land.

To further emphasize front-line resource management, the Bureau is modernizing its field structure to eliminate duplicative layers and tasks that exist in the current organizational structure.



### **Native American Issues**

BLM negotiated and implemented over a dozen cooperative agreements with Tribal governments, including self-determination contracts, intergovernmental agreements, and cooperative management memoranda. Among these are a resource protection agreement with the Agua Caliente Tribe in Palm Springs, California; a cultural resource protection agreement with the Bannock Shoshone Tribe in Idaho; and a cooperative resource management agreement for habitat protection, as well as range, cultural, and watershed management, with the Hoopa Tribe in California.

Legislation known as "The California Indian Land Transfer Act" fulfills a commitment of the Secretary to specifically address the land needs of Tribes in California. The measure also provides a model for FLPMA-based

land status review, evaluation, BIA coordination, and criteria for transfer, where public lands are sought by Tribes for reservation (trust) purposes.



### **New World Mine**

Early in 1996, the BLM developed a withdrawal proposal to protect lands in the Gallatin National Forest in Montana. A proposal by the Crown Butte Mining Company to mine certain lands in this area, if allowed, could have significant adverse impacts on Yellowstone National Park lands. The BLM's response was prepared in accordance with the President's statement that the area would be protected from future mineral entry to protect watersheds within the drainages of the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone, Soda Butte Creek, and the Stillwater River, and to maintain the water quality and freshwater fishery resources within Yellowstone National Park. The segregation created by the initial withdrawal proposal allowed the lands to be protected while negotiations between the Federal government and Crown Butte proceeded. An agreement between the parties was reached in August 1996 that allows the United States to acquire Crown Butte's interests in exchange for lands elsewhere.





### Northwest Forest Plan

In 1996, the BLM continues to implement the Northwest Forest Plan by:

- ❖ accelerating timber sale preparation and offering, with approximately 182.5 million board feet being offered (15 million above the level planned);
- ❖ completing watershed analyses on 642,235 acres; and
- ❖ awarding approximately \$7.7 million in contracts for the Jobs-In-The-Woods initiative, which provides family wage jobs for displaced workers while restoring damaged watersheds and stimulating local economies.

In addition, BLM is preparing approximately 30 million board feet of replacement timber for sales, subject to Section 2001(k) of the Rescission Act (P.L. 104-19).



### Oil and Gas Inspection and Enforcement Program

The BLM onshore oil and gas program is one of the major mineral leasing programs in the Department. Under Vice President Gore's Reinventing Government (REGO II), the

BLM proposed to transfer oil and gas inspection and enforcement responsibilities concerning production verification to the individual States and Indian Tribes. A final report was issued in April 1996 and included recommendations and concerns of States and Tribes. The report was reviewed and comments were accepted from the public and industry. Comments from the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, representing governors of 29 oil and gas producing States, were generally positive. The BLM has contacted all States regarding their interest in a possible agreement to take on Inspection and Enforcement responsibilities and has begun active negotiations with some.



### Recreation

During 1996, the BLM began a Bureauwide tourism strategy and implementation plan. The Bureau has also:

- ❖ worked with the Recreation Roundtable to develop national information about customer requirements;
- ❖ developed a pilot recreation fees initiative, in concert with other Interior Department agencies;
- ❖ signed 22 "Golden Partnership" agreements covering over 200

recreation sites on BLM public lands;

- ❖ designated two additional Back Country Byways, increasing the program to 64 Byways totaling 3,179 miles; and
- ❖ created a BLM Web site to highlight recreational opportunities.



### Right-of-Way Processing

Significant steps have been taken this year to reduce the processing time for small rights-of-way. Applicants who agree to a standard cost recovery fee are now receiving approval much more quickly than before. This effort has assisted the industry by providing faster service and the BLM by reducing processing time.



### Riparian Restoration

The BLM and Forest Service in 1996 created an inter-agency Riparian Service team to preserve and restore crucial riparian and wetland areas. The team will work with local and State governments, constituent groups, and private landowners to reach a common understanding of healthy riparian systems and to explore cooperative opportunities for restoration projects. Other specific BLM accomplishments in riparian



protection and restoration during the past year include:

- ❖ development of 565 new riparian improvement projects and maintenance of 640 existing projects;
- ❖ acquisition, primarily through land exchanges, of 37 tracts of riparian areas in eight States; and
- ❖ completion of inventory assessments on 8,800 miles of streams and 72,000 acres of wetlands, as well as 75 in-flow assessments to determine the water quality needed to support healthy riparian and wetland habitat.



### **The Secretary's Land Exchange Initiative**

The BLM is working with other agencies to complete land exchanges, primarily in the western United States and Alaska. A Departmental working group has been formed to track high-priority exchanges, resolve various exchange issues that surface at the Departmental level, and provide assistance to field offices. The BLM is streamlining the exchange process through:

- ❖ special project teams with milestones and assignments;

- ❖ use of the assembled land exchange concept, which significantly reduces time and processing costs of small multiparceled exchanges;
- ❖ coordinated activities with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to streamline the cultural resource clearance process;
- ❖ use of competitive land exchange procedures for lands with high commercial value; and
- ❖ finalization of BLM's exchange processing manual.

Acquisitions recently completed include:

- ❖ 6,000 acres near Salt Lake City containing recreational sites and elk and deer ranges;
- ❖ 900 acres of land adjacent to the Grande Ronde National Wild and Scenic River;
- ❖ the first phase of the Santa Ana/Ball Ranch exchange in New Mexico, which resolves a long-standing Congressional mandate to transfer Federal land inholdings to the Santa Ana Pueblo; and

- ❖ 1,300 acres in the Spring Mountains Recreation Area of Toiyabe National Forest.



### **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

The BLM recommended 25 Arizona river segments on 13 rivers for Wild and Scenic designation. This Record of Decision (ROD) identifies 233.5 miles in these river segments covering 65,500 acres of public lands. The ROD also releases 19 river segments in 14 river areas, totaling 172.3 miles, from further Wild and Scenic designation. In Oregon, BLM designated the Walla Walla River as a Wild and Scenic River, bringing BLM's Wild and Scenic River total to 34 designations covering 2,032 miles.



### **Wildland Fire Management Policy**

A year-long interagency and interdepartmental review of national Federal fire policy has led to a uniform policy for all Federal land agencies dealing with wildfire. The policy includes the following key provisions:

- ❖ affirmation that safety is the first priority in every fire management activity, with property and natural/cultural resources jointly



becoming the second priority;

- ❖ recognition of fire as a natural element in ecosystem management;
- ❖ a mandate for close coordination with State, Tribal, and local partners in developing wildfire elements for land use plans; and
- ❖ a requirement for clearly identifying, in protection agreements, the role of Federal agencies and local agencies in the wildland/urban interface.



### Withdrawal Review

During the past year, a process was put in place to streamline the withdrawal review program. This program, which was authorized under Section 204(l) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, has not been productive in the past because of the cumbersome process involved in meeting the requirements of the Act for all withdrawal reviews in the western States, excluding Alaska. Particularly burdensome was the requirement that all withdrawal reviews be submitted to the President and the Congress for review.

The new process categorizes withdrawal reviews so that many of them can be processed without taking the cumbersome steps mentioned above. Instead, the new process will allow reviews to be accomplished at the Assistant Secretary level.



### Weeds (Exotic and Invasive Plants)

Continuing a leadership role that began with the "Partners Against Weeds" Initiative, the BLM has accelerated an aggressive Weed Management Program, coordinating the resources of Federal land management agencies, State and local governments, and concerned citizens in the fight against noxious weeds. This initiative has resulted in a limited use of the "Fire Model" in detecting and treating new weed populations and the limited use of BLM fire crews in weed detection and treatment.

The BLM is utilizing Demonstration Weed Management Areas to illustrate methods by which the spread of weeds can be decreased or controlled, and has solicited pilot projects in each State in which the use of partnerships is a key consideration.



### Workforce Diversity

Recognizing the high priority the Department placed during the past year on the resolution of backlogs of Complaints of Discrimination, the BLM responded aggressively, eliminating the agency's own backlog and offering assistance to other bureaus within the Department. The year 1996 was also the first full year of delegation of complaints processing authority to State and Center Directors, an initiative that has resulted in more timely processing of Complaints of Discrimination and that has been accompanied by a reduction of more than 50 percent in the number of complaints filed nationwide. The BLM has also diligently pursued stronger working relationships with organizations serving the various minority communities. Memoranda of Understanding to promote coordination and mutual support are being prepared with the National Association for Equal Opportunity and with the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters.



# *Working with the People to Improve the Health of the Land*

## **Priorities for 1997**



### **Abandoned Mine Sites**

The BLM has developed a prototype watershed approach to managing pollution and related mine lands problems and plans to test it in Colorado and Montana in the coming year. Effective partnerships with States, other agencies, and stakeholders are a crucial part of this important remediation effort.



### **Automated Land and Mineral Records System (ALMRS)**

The BLM continues to make significant progress toward implementing the Automated Land and Records System, which will modernize and automate many of the agency's information systems and extensive federal land and minerals record processing activities. In 1997 the BLM will test "Release 1" software operating capability. The BLM will then begin Bureauwide deployment of ALMRS "Release 1" software on a state-by-state basis. Once deployment is completed, the BLM will transition to the operations and maintenance phase of the project and begin preparing strategies and requirements for ALMRS "Release 2."



### **Grazing and Healthy Rangelands**

Implementation of the Healthy Rangelands Initiative will remain a major priority for the BLM in the coming year. The Bureau will continue to work closely with BLM contacts for the Resource Advisory Councils as standards and guidelines are completed and incorporated into the initiative.



### **IG and GAO Recommendations**

As a result of audits, the Inspector General or General Accounting Office often recommends actions to improve the program audited. The recommended actions that BLM agrees to implement will be carried out within the timeframe set in our responses to the audit.



### **Internet Capability**

Improving communication with and information flow to our customers will continue to be a high priority for the BLM. We will work diligently to explore, test, and implement the latest technology and avenues of information exchange to improve our responsiveness to the public; to promote partnerships with other agencies and with pri-

vate industry; and to provide better information, land management decisions, and service to public land and public information users.



### **Mining Law**

The BLM, working with the Solicitor's Office, has prepared a plan to complete processing of 90 percent of existing patent applications within 5 years. During 1997, the first year of the plan, BLM will take necessary implementation actions.



### **Native American Issues**

Native American priorities for 1997 will focus on implementing 638 contracts and cooperative agreements negotiated in 1996; developing an Administrative Dispute Resolution model with Tribes to settle resource management conflict issues; processing land transfer requests in accordance with the provisions of H.R. 3642, "The California Indian Land Transfer Act"; and developing more training agreements for cadastral survey, range, cultural resources, and minerals management, including inspection and enforcement and resource protection.



❖  
**Oil and Gas Initiatives**

The BLM is currently in the process of determining whether a royalty rate reduction for producers of marginal gas properties is warranted and would ultimately result in greater recovery. Also under evaluation by the Green River Basin Advisory Committee is the concept of "eco-royalty relief" for producers of federal oil and gas properties. Credits—in the form of royalty reductions or royalty holidays—would reward operators for conducting resource inventories or monitoring, or for undertaking reclamation activities beyond those required by their lease or permits. In addition, the BLM will continue the REGO II initiative through collaboration with State governments to increase the efficiency of program administration.

❖  
**Organization**

The Washington Office organization will be realigned to be more user-friendly for customers and to reconnect the administrative and task responsibilities into a single supervision role. A cost-avoidance measure will be in place to make additional dollars available for core programs.

❖  
**Recreation**

During 1997, the BLM will be implementing the first of 3 years of the pilot Recreation Fee Initiative, as well as the Department's Tourism strategy and a unified camping reservation system for all public lands.

❖  
**Utah's Grand Staircase/Escalante National Monument**

With the September 18 announcement by President Clinton creating the Grand Staircase/Escalante National Monument in Utah, the Secretary's office designated a team to develop plans for BLM's implementation of the President's decision. As the first National Monument to be placed under BLM management, this designation will protect 1.7 million acres of some of the Nation's most environmentally, scientifically, and culturally significant land. The BLM will manage the area to protect its important cultural, archeological, and biological resources. The President's action will result in the development of a management plan over the next 3 years. This plan will outline future costs and management needs under a process that will provide ample opportunity for full participation by the public and by State and local officials in Utah.

❖  
**Wild Horse and Burro Program**

In response to concerns that the BLM has identified in managing wild horse and burro populations—problems attributable in part to extreme drought conditions in Nevada and other areas of the West—the Bureau recently created a special task force to conduct a thorough review of the program. The team will draw on the knowledge and expertise both of personnel from within the Bureau and of individuals representing independent associations.

❖  
**Workforce Diversity**

Beginning in FY 1997, the BLM will initiate a more comprehensive and structured approach to the management of its nationwide Affirmative Employment Program (AEP). This strategy will include implementation of a series of targeted recruitment plans designed to communicate clearly management's priorities for AEP program administration. The plans will provide managers with tangible assistance in changing the BLM's existing employment trends toward a more balanced representation of women and minorities in the agency's mainstream occupations.



*“The public lands,  
and the resources  
they contain,  
are a legacy  
we inherited from  
our forebears.  
Our collective  
challenge is  
to pass them on,  
unimpaired,  
to our children.”*

Mike Dombeck

